

Dear Ladies, Gentlemen and Legislative Committee members

As U.S. citizens, we have all become aware of the financial and economic crisis that has hit us all. As a result of these hard economic times we are all needing to cut back where we can. I can appreciate that our state finds itself in need of lowering debt and increasing assets. However, having said that I have recently become aware of the request to create further cutbacks in our legal aid system.

As a Marriage and Family therapist working for Catholic Charities, I am most often working with no income or low income families that are living within the city of Hartford.

In my service to this community and other low income communities around the state, I have become aware that children identified with significant behavioral problems from early elementary through highschool are looked at with psychopathology and mandated for mental health services. It is during the counseling process that I most often find undiagnosed learning disabilities or learning challenges within this population.

Parents and caregivers of these children often are not able to effectively communicate with the educational administrators and teachers. Parents are often unaware of how to attend a PPT meeting or can even begin to know how to advocate for their child's rights. Because many educational facilities have become overburdened with too many students and not enough funding, the schools are not apt to help a family obtain further services for a child that the school simply cannot afford. As a result, many children with learning disabilities and challenges, without a proper advocate, do not get the tools that they need to become successful students. Instead, these children often drop out of school, become further behavior problems and at times can create a further burden on the community and taxpayers.

I urge you not to dismiss our young people who have learning challenges. I urge you to allow further funding to our legal aid system so they may continue to advocate for our children.

Thank You.

Nadine Oliveri
Marriage and Family Therapist
